

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT UPDATE

September 1999

'Big bang' tests terrorism readiness

What seemed like a normal day at the Big Bethel Water Treatment Plant in Hampton, Va., quickly took on a surreal quality when workers discovered a biological agent in the community water supply.

To make matters worse, workers also discovered explosive devices near chlorine tanks that could have been used to neutralize the agent.

One device exploded rupturing a chlorine tank. While responders waited for a second device to be disarmed, fumes were carried downwind to Bethel Manor Elementary School. On the highway, a school bus driver was overcome by the caustic fumes sending the bus careening through traffic and coming to rest on its side. When the smoke cleared, six people were dead and 25 injured at the water treatment plant, and 20 injured in the bus accident.

Luckily this scenario is fiction rather than fact. However, the increasing threat of domestic terrorism has caused emergency managers to take preparedness to another level. The scene above set the stage for about 200 military and civilian emergency response teams and planners from Hampton Roads who recently took part in the area's first joint field exercise involving weapons of mass destruction or WMD.

Langley Air Force Base and the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Norfolk Division co-hosted the exercise with the primary goal of testing Air Force readiness for such an event. Fire and rescue crews from Newport News, Hampton, York County, and Poquoson also participated, along with the Virginia State Police bomb squad and three area hospitals.

Evaluators and observers from VDES and local agencies were at both sites to review how the agencies worked together and to



The NNFH hazmat team decontaminates a victim of the simulated chlorine release. (Photo courtesy of Langley AFB 1st Fighter Wing PAO).

note shortcomings and successes. Hazmat Officer Richard Parker joined VDES Hazardous Materials Field Manager Greg Britt as an evaluator.

He says this is the first time he can remember an exercise of this scale being conducted with players from the federal, state, and local levels. He adds it was also a first for regional teams to work with a military hazardous response team.

Though it may have been a first, it stands out for Lt. Nate Carabell from Langley's 1st Fighter Wing Plans, Programs and Evaluation Group as one of the exercise's best success stories. Carabell calls their teamwork with the Newport News hazmat team a highlight that "put smiles on our faces." He says the medical response from all players was excellent and a major event focus as well.

Getting there, however, was not always easy. Carabell says just bringing all the

players to the table was one of the hardest parts of the exercise planning. The number of jurisdictions involved created a coordination nightmare. For example, Carabell says, the water treatment plant is owned by the Army, located in Hampton, and has agreements in place for an Air Force response.

While all players found the exercise to be beneficial, it was also a culture shock as they learned valuable lessons in conducting interjurisdictional operations.

Recognize operational differences

Whether it is role playing or real life, every organization has its own procedures and plans and these differences must be addressed for operational success. In this exercise, military and civilian entities had to come together to protect the public, and both sides had a lot to learn about each other.

"This exercise involved a military organization which recognized civilian concerns," says York County Fire and Life Safety Assistant Chief, Robert Brown. "At the same time, they have a different way of doing business."

Brown says that, while he found his Langley counterparts extremely flexible and easy to work with, the exercise did not necessarily reflect how they would respond in a real emergency.

Carabell says they recognized the scenario was skewed to test specific functions within Langley's operations. They forced the 911 call to come into their dispatchers to see whether their memorandums of agreement would work as intended.

Capt. Tracy Hanger, EMS bureau head for Hampton's Fire and Rescue Department, adds differences between battlefield and mass casualty scenarios should be addressed for future exercises. *(continued on page 3)*

Va. Beach citizens converse about Y2K

by Lisë Chandler White
Va. Beach City Manager's Office

As the millennium draws near, the President's "Y2K czar" is as concerned about complacency as he is compliance.

"A wait-and-see attitude just won't do," said John A. Koskinen, chairman of the President's Council on Year 2000 Conversion, who has been traveling across the country to urge the nation to be ready for the century date change.

Koskinen and a cadre of leaders in government and commerce spoke to citizens on Aug. 18 during the Virginia Community Connections on the Year 2000 challenge, a series that was developed in conjunction with Koskinen's tour.

"Everyone wants to know, 'What's going to happen to me?'" said Koskinen, who was appointed assistant to the President and Y2K council chair in February 1998. In that role, Koskinen is responsible for federal government efforts to ensure that its critical information technology systems operate smoothly as we enter the new millennium. He also coordinates federal relationships with governments and the private sector across the nation and around the world.

"If there are problems, we want to be sure it's not because of failure of the federal system," said Koskinen, who feels confident that the power grids supplying the nation's electricity will hold, banks will remain strong, and air travelers in this country will be safe. He is also pleased that "the percentage of small businesses who said they were going to do nothing has dropped."

Sponsored by the Commonwealth of Virginia's Century Date Change Initiative Project Office, the event was held at the Virginia Beach Pavilion Convention Center and simulcast to Christopher Newport University in Newport News.

Virginia Beach Mayor Meyera E. Oberndorf welcomed the audience of 350 to the program, which was moderated by Tidewater Community College President Dr. Deborah M. DiCroce. Oberndorf, Koskinen, and CDCI Project Officer Bette H. Dillehay were joined by a panel of Y2K experts from municipal and state government, transportation, healthcare, the military, utilities, banking and food service.

"A well-informed public is a prepared and calm public," said Dillehay. "We are eager to give citizens the opportunity to have their Y2K concerns addressed, and these forums enable that."

Rob Ferguson of Kempsville said he is "genuinely concerned" about Y2K. He knows people who are pessimistic about the challenge, but says he is personally preparing and hoping for the best.

"I have a week's worth of back-up power," he said. "Yet, I will be working with my church and my neighbors to keep the lines of communication open and make sure we watch out for each other. After all, you're only as strong as your weakest link."

Allen Fuentes of Cove Point believes "there's no question that something is going to happen." He came to the program primarily to hear what the power company had to say but also to hear the answers to "a lot of questions I probably didn't think of," he said.



Hampton Roads Y2K Citizen
INFOSOURCE

Participants received brochures from the Y2K Citizen Info Source, CDCI, and the American Red Cross. When the program concluded, Joshua Solovskoy, who attended the program with his wife and four-month-old child, said, "This was a very good opportunity to have all these representatives get together."

When the clock strikes midnight on Dec. 31, Solovskoy will be at a New Year's celebration. After attending the Community Connection, he said, "I'm even more convinced that it's going to be a bump in the road."

Future Community Connections will be announced in the media and posted on the CDCI Web site at www.cdci.state.va.us. CDCI can also be reached by phone at 1-888-2000-258.

Winter Preparedness Week moved up for '99

Like the proverbial "ice man," winter and Y2K cometh. For some time now, you've been urging citizens to prepare for the date change as they would a winter storm.

This year, the VDES winter campaign has been moved up to Nov. 14-20 to provide you with additional resources to capitalize on the many similarities between the two events.

If the December 1998 ice storm gave us a preview of coming attractions, you'll soon have your own program guide. Look for a vast array of winter preparedness materials via mailouts and postings to our Web site in the coming months. Call (804) 897-6510 for more information.

Hampton Roads Hurricane Expo '99



***Always prepared.** Mark E. Junghans from Red Cross Disaster Services discusses disaster supply kits with shoppers during the July Hurricane Expo in Patrick Henry Mall. The Hampton Roads Emergency Manager's Committee sponsored the Newport News event which also featured exhibits from the Peninsula Animal Disaster Services & the Amateur Radio Emergency Services/Radio Amateur Civil Emergency Services, as well as a display house illustrating proper hurricane strapping. This travelling exhibit has also been featured in Virginia Beach and Chesapeake and will go to York County this month.*

HAZ MAT



Joint project may mean new EOC for Virginia

If the 15-inch-thick reinforced concrete walls of the state Emergency Operations Center could talk, they could recount in vivid detail the evolution of an agency from humble beginnings in civil defense to 24-hour all-hazards response and recovery-oriented operations. They'd probably also say, "it's getting a little crowded in here."



Originally constructed as a bomb shelter for the governor in the mid-1950s, the structure was converted to an EOC in the 1970s. The agency's responsibilities have broadened over time, but the space in which to perform them has not. Planning has been underway for years to seek funding for a new state-of-the-art structure to house this central emergency management function.

"We have recognized for some time that operating in the current EOC is one of our greatest challenges to providing the level of service the citizens of Virginia need and deserve," say VDES Deputy State Coordinator George Foresman. "Accordingly, our long-range planning has addressed this shortfall as we have other public safety issues such as mitigation and mutual aid."

As the VEOC and Virginia State Police administrative headquarters have both outgrown their current homes, these two agencies have partnered on a design concept for a new combined facility. This three-story structure would be located next to the current state police headquarters facing Midlothian Turnpike and devote the entire lower floor (below ground) to EOC operations.

"These types of partnership projects between state agencies are more cost effective and efficient," Foresman noted. "It can be a win-win situation from the standpoint of operations, budget, and our support to local government and our taxpaying customers."

With a working design that calls for about 17,000 square feet of usable space, the proposed EOC could easily accommodate state and federal teams working side by side in an augmented scenario. Though the external parameters of the current EOC measure about 4,000 square feet, Deputy Director of Operations Fred Vincent says the usable space is closer to 2,700 square feet.

Within that space, Vincent says 12 people work in close proximity on a daily basis. In a crisis, the number swells anywhere from 50 to 150 persons who must conduct split operations due to space constraints. To put it in perspective, Director of Operations Jim Dixon says the current EOC is about the same size as the communications center in the new design. Other design features include:

- ✓ Improved parking with a designated area for FEMA Mobile Emergency Response System/other federal resources
- ✓ A media area with satellite hookups to transmit from the site
- ✓ Improved physical arrangement of the communications hub in relation to the work space
- ✓ Facility designed to accommodate new technologies

Both Foresman and Vincent emphasize there is much more territory to cover before the project moves from producing paper to pouring concrete. Though the initial design phase was approved by the governor and General Assembly, they caution there are still independent cost reviews, pitches for gubernatorial approval, and another submission to the governor and General Assembly for construction funds. If all goes well for this joint project, Virginia could have a new home for its EOC.

"Big Bang" (continued from page 1)



"You have to mesh expectations with the way people operate," says Hanger. "During the planning, we were divided into different groups such as fire, EMS, or hospitals. In an actual emergency, we would need to share resources in a joint unified command."

Deputy Chief Frank Mitchell, Newport News Fire Department, worked both scenarios and also encountered operational differences related to the military chain of command.

"We gave an ambulance driver an assignment to transport a patient to a specific hospital [not Langley] and the crew refused to do it until given proper authorization," says Mitchell.

Carabell acknowledges the paradigm shift was quite enlightening for them as well, explaining that, "in our world" the fire department 'owns' the firefighters and the medical teams are a separate entity. "In the civilian world, the fire chief 'owns' all of these players."

Set realistic expectations for participation

Both Hanger and Brown agree staffing is at a premium for fire and rescue units. With no reserve medics and no ability to pay overtime, York County had to rely on other local players when the patient load far outstripped the ambulances available. Brown also stresses that his units were running actual emergency calls that day.

On the other hand, they point out that area hospitals expected and were staffed to handle more participation than was possible in the exercise. Parker adds that area hospitals were first-time players and willing to participate more fully in preparing for disasters.

Carabell also recognized that limited resources restricted their ability to include all the response steps for this type of event. In the future, he says, they would hope to extend the duration of the exercise to "do it the right way."

Identify system incompatibilities

All players agree that the incompatibility of communication links was one of the major obstacles they encountered.

"They could not communicate on our channels and we could not talk on theirs," says Mitchell. "We had to put one of our people with them [military players] with a portable radio to pass information."

York County's Assistant Chief Mike Player was "joined at the hip" with Langley's fire chief at the bus accident so each could hear what came over the other's radio. Mitchell says pairing services at command points could become taxing in a real world incident.

Prepare for joint operations

Presidential Decision Directive 39 allocated funds to create and train rapidly deployable teams to prevent and respond to terrorist acts. Virginia Beach and Newport News are two of 120 cities that received grants to better prepare to combat terrorism.

Mitchell thinks this exercise prepared them for a larger-scale WMD event scheduled this month in Virginia Beach.

"The exercise and critique were good learning experiences," says Mitchell. "We were able to determine a lot of areas for emphasis to help us for both the Virginia Beach exercise and the Newport News scenario set for May 2000."



Training Calendar

Emergency Management

Disaster Related Needs of Seniors & Persons with Disabilities
September 9/Culpeper

Emergency Planning
September 14-16/Harrisonburg

Leadership & Influence
September 21-23/Salem

Developing Volunteer Resources
September 28-29/Richmond

Reservist Training

Emergency Information System Sustainment Training
October 7/Richmond
November 4/Richmond

Information & Planning Branch Workshop
September 8/Richmond

Technological Hazards

Hazmat Branch & Safety Officer (Pilot Course)
September 20-22/Va. Beach

Hazardous Materials Technician
October-November/Wise (weekends)
October 18-29/Ashland

Search and Rescue

Field Team Member (Part I)
September 10-12/Greene County

Practical Search Operations (Part I)
September 17-19/Mount Jackson

Practical Search Operations
September 27-30/Quantico (Tentative)

Field Team Member (Part II)
October 1-3/Greene County

Practical Search Operations (Part II)
October 15-17/Mount Jackson

GSAR Institute (Part I)
October 22-24/Jamestown 4-H

SAR Council
October 30/Richmond

SAR Management Conference
October 30-31/Richmond

GSAR Institute (Part II)
November 12-14/Jamestown 4-H

Is Hazmat ready for the next millennium?

Find out at the 1999 Hazardous Materials Conference, Sept. 23-25, at the Va. Beach Cavalier Hotel. The program features more than 70 workshops and an exhibit hall showcasing the latest products/services.

Attendees can also receive academic credit/CEUs from the University of Richmond.

For more information, contact Starr Selden at (757) 491-2800 or Mary Powell at (757) 474-3096.

News You Can Use

If Mohammed can't come to the mountain ... In an effort to meet the needs of busy professionals, FEMA is now offering a computer-based course to provide emergency managers and decision makers with basic information about hurricane preparedness. Community Hurricane Preparedness, IS-324, comes in a CD-ROM format and includes instruction on how hurricanes form, potential hazards, how the National Weather Service forecasts future behavior, and tools and guidelines to help managers prepare their communities.

The IS-324 CD-ROM is only available in limited quantities to members of the emergency management community and decision makers at the local, state, or federal levels who work in hurricane-prone areas. For more information on enrollment and software requirements for this course, visit FEMA's Web site at www.fema.gov/emi/is324.htm or contact the FEMA Independent Study Coordinator on line at www.fema.gov/emi/ispcmnt.htm.



*Hurricane Andrew
(NOAA Photo Library).*



(Courtesy Photo)

One for the road... The new VDES hazmat how-to manual, "Guidelines for the Mitigation of Accidental Discharges of Motor Vehicle Fluids (Non Cargo)," is now available online at the VDES Web site. This resource guide provides practical advice on

mitigating accidental discharges of motor vehicle fluids in any quantity, either from an accident or an unintentional act.

As limited quantities are available, the best way to get your own copy is to download it from the "What's New" or "Emergency Management Information Center" links. The 1999 Hazmat Conference will also feature a workshop on this document.

Contact your local hazmat officer for more information about the guide. If you're not sure who that individual may be, call Greg Britt at (804) 897-6578 for contact information.



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